**Lesson 03 : Introduction to the Psycholinguistics- part 03-**

The question of what psycholinguistics is has bothered the mind of scholars in the past sixty or so years since Transformational Generative Grammar movement has forced the subject of the link between language and its relationship to the human psychology to the fore front of linguistic studies. Essentially, psycholinguistics is the study of language as it relates to the human mind. Some scholars see psycholinguistics as the study of how language influences and is influenced by the human mind. Other scholars, especially those with psychological leaning, tend to see psycholinguistics in terms of the experimental form of the study of human mind within the laboratory and its ability to comprehend language. This has led to the broad division/categorisation of the area of study into the psycholinguistics and the psychology of language.[[1]](#footnote-2)

1. Psycholinguists study how words meaning, sentence meaning, and discourse meaning are computed and represented in the mind. They study how complex words and sentences are com­posed in speech and how they are broken down into their consti­tuents in the acts of listening and reading. In short, psycholin­guists seek to understand how language is done.
2. Psycholinguistics or psychology of language is the study of the psychological and neurobiological factors that enable humans to acquire, use, and understand language.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Aitchison (1990:333) defines psycholinguistics as the study of language and mind, which “aims to model the way the mind” works in “relation to language”. Looking at this definition, it is obvious that her view of psycholinguistics is that which maps out the strategising of language usage as well as language comprehension. To her, then,

anything that the mind does in relation to language is psycholinguistics. She further distinguishes between psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. Her point of contention is that while neurolinguistics seeks to link language to brain functioning and its influence on language, psycholinguistics measures the unobservable operations of the mind as it relates to the human language experience. It is obvious then that the human brain relates to language in a physically observable manner as is seen in the language of aphasics, while psycholinguistics has many nuances in linguistic employment of humans that may not be possible to measure in a realistic manner. One could agree with this observation as the manner in which medical science could measure language-related task of humans is not realistically possible in psycholinguistics. This

has thus resulted in so many controversies concerning the subject as it relates to its source in the work of psychologists and linguists.

Aitchison (1990) also claims that psychologists’ attempts to study the language of humans in the laboratory environment have proven unrealistic. This, she notes, has made it obvious that language is a social phenomenon, which needs to be observed beyond the walls of the laboratory. For, according to her, it is effectively frustrating to

psychologists who found that a realistic state of affairs in terms of finding how the human mind works in relation to their language production and comprehension could not give the correct data in a laboratory environment.

Another important issue we need to consider here is that, while psychologists maintain that laboratory study of the human language is the best way to elicit data for psycholinguistic study, linguists continue to favour a descriptive study of the human language as they see the more naturalistic study of language as providing best evidence for trustworthy data in psycholinguistic study. Even though psychologists have always looked at laboratory experiments as the most acceptable, the reality is that linguistics that best fits and likely to show a realistic state of affairs in terms of human language usage may be best elicited from human beings in real situations. Descriptive linguistics thus provides the most sensible manner of collecting psycholinguistic data. Having said this, one needs to also state that the linguist as a source of data is still tenable. When one considers the way language death is spreading to the languages of the world, a time may come, and as Crystal (2000) has even already reported, the time may already be with us, when there may be only one speaker of a language of the world. And clearly, it is from the assumed internal processing of the linguistic usages of the informant of that particular language that is on the verge of extinction that the psycholinguistic operations would have to be deduced. As Lang (1994) asserts, language operates in a social form even while presenting its psychological foundation.

It is however this psychological foundation that psycholinguistics seeks to unravel.

To Hawkins (1994), the internal processing is an important means of unravelling the meaning content in a linguistic context. Human psychology thus retains its important position in human communication process. Vygotsky (1962) actually avers that communication with language only makes meaning in relation to deciphering the

communicative intentions of the speaker. This essentially refers to the psychological basis of language use by both speaker and hearer.

Even though many scholars have found Chomsky’s (1965) cognitive base for language use objectionable on many fronts, especially his claims of exclusive dominance of competence over performance in language usage, the fact is that his

recognition of the important role of the human mind in the psychological base for human language performatives is very insightful. Halliday’s (1971) ideational concept appears to lean towards this view too even though he views the sociological

foundation of language as a stronger base of human language operations.

As Daniel (2009) firmly notes, the two bases are important in true linguistic inquiries.

The link between the two foundations of language obviously affects the way we communicate. As such, linguistic acquisition, processing, comprehension and production are all intertwined.

We may thus be able to aver that psycholinguistics is essentially about language usage of human beings and how it is affected by their psychological dispositions to its acquisition, comprehension and production. [[3]](#footnote-4)

Psycholinguistics is often defined as the study of language and the mind. It explores hat goes on in the mind when a person acquire, comprehend, store and produce language.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Psycholinguistics or the psychology of language is the bridge between linguistics and psychology. It studies the mental mecha­nisms that make language acquired, processed, understood and pro­duced.[[5]](#footnote-6)

1. Iyabode O. Nwabueze et all : **COURSE TITLE: PSYCHOLINGUITICS**, National Open University of Nigeria, FACULTY OF ARTS , 2020, P05 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. El Ouchdi Ilhem Zoubida : **Courses in Psycholinguistics for Master one students in language sciences**, Abou Bekr Belkaid University- Tlemcen-, Faculty of Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English, 2022., p07 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Iyabode O. Nwabueze et all : **COURSE TITLE: PSYCHOLINGUITICS**, National Open University of Nigeria, FACULTY OF ARTS , 2020, P05-07 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Nagham Q . Yahya : **Introduction to Psycholinguistics**, Tikrit University College of Education for Humanities English Department, 2023, P02 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. El Ouchdi Ilhem Zoubida : **Courses in Psycholinguistics for Master one students in language sciences**, Abou Bekr Belkaid University- Tlemcen-, Faculty of Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English, 2022., P05 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)